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DR. NORMAN LAMM

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A PERSONAL MEMOIR: ENCOURAGING INTELLECTUAL INDEPENDENCE

In conversation with one of my associates at Yeshiva University, I recalled two incidents that made a profound impression upon me. It is worth putting it on paper for my own use at some later time.

In the early 1960's when I was participating in the leadership of the drive for an Eruv in Manhattan, I first approached the Rav to solicit his opinion. We were sitting in the luncheonette across from the Main Building, and I told him of my plans and asked him if he would approve. He shrugged his shoulders and said, "To tell you the truth, I don't know Hilkhos Eruvin. But why wait for me? Study the matter well, and after you feel you have enough information on the subject, make up your own mind and act accordingly." It so happens that later he did study the matter, and probably came to a negative conclusion on the question of the Eruv in Manhattan, but that is irrelevant. What is important is that he encouraged my intellectual independence.

Some months later, after we proclaimed the Eruv and the Agudas HaRabbonim objected, under the leadership of the late and much lamented Rabbi Aharon Kotler, א"י Rabbi Immanuel Jacobovits and I went to see him in his home in Lakewood. He was very gracious, and his response to our queries was, "But I don't know

Hilkhot Eruvin..."

I compare the two stories. Both men were possessed of a high degree of intellectual integrity. They were not afraid to say that they did not know. But there was one difference between them: The Rav encouraged me to intellectual independence as well as integrity, to make up my own mind and act accordingly. No such encouragement came from Rabbi Kotler whose sense of authority would not permit such openness.